

New Freedom Initiative: Building Sustainable Systems for Independence - Summary of CMS Grantee Conference held in Baltimore, MD February 28 - March 2, 2005

A welcome and overview were provided by Mark McClellan, M.D., Ph.D., Administrator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Dr. McClellan briefly presented information on major current initiatives and upcoming changes to the Medicare programs as a result of the Medicare Modernization Act. He also talked about recent improvements in the Medicaid program which will improve benefits for Medicaid beneficiaries and also help to reduce state costs.

A plenary speaker offered a new model for defining human service delivery systems and understanding the process of systems change. The building blocks of systems change were outlined and specific strategies for engaging in system change initiatives were examined. Participants had an opportunity to work in small groups to explore in detail different components of strategic thinking required to stimulate real and lasting change.

Another plenary focused on key factors that foster enduring and meaningful systems change in social service delivery. Presenters highlighted the ingredients of a good community-based system from a consumer's perspective and how those ingredients can be explicitly embedded in a state's strategic plan.

Throughout the conference there were many concurrent sessions. Topics included: Streamlining Access to Services; The Big Payoff: Employment Outcomes; A Practical 101 Session on the Essentials of Housing Finance and Developing Affordable Housing Coordinated with Services; Building-In Quality: Measuring It and Improving It; Supporting Family Caregivers; Facilitating Partnerships and Building Coalitions Across Aging and Disability Service Networks; Building Relationships with Public Housing Agencies; Creating a Multi-Program Web Site through Collaboration; The Power of Automated Assessment Tools; Establishing Individual Budgets – Models that Work; Exploring Home and Community-Based Options for Children with Serious Emotional Disturbances; Effective Cross Grant Collaboration and Coordination; Lessons Learned from Nursing Home Transition Programs; Identifying Policy Barriers to Self-Direction; Promoting Evidence-Based Practices in the Delivery of Mental Health Care; Feast or Food Fight: Policy Implications of the Medicaid Buy-In; Effective Emergency Back-Up Models for Consumers who Self-Direct; Worker Recruitment and Retention Strategies; How Medicaid Can Support the Mental Health Recovery Model; and, Do Employment Services Support Self-Determination.

The grants are part of President Bush's "New Freedom Initiative," which promotes the goal of community living for individuals with disabilities and long-term illnesses. Under this initiative, which began in 2001, 10 federal agencies work with states and community organizations to remove barriers to community living.